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*RI Department of Education  
in Collaboration with the  
RI Department of Health*

# **Weight Loss and Dietary Behavior Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students 1997 and 2001**

This summary presents selected information on weight loss and dietary behaviors that affect health risks among Rhode Island adolescents, based on results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS is an anonymous and voluntary survey conducted in alternate years among randomly selected samples of high school students in over 50 participating states, territories, and municipalities nationwide. The YRBS was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health-risk behaviors that contribute to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and other health and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

During the spring of 1997 and 2001 the YRBS was administered to 1,528 and 1,396 randomly selected Rhode Island public school students, respectively, in grades 9 through 12. With response rates of 60% in 1997 and 63% in 2001, the results are representative of all public high school students statewide. Survey findings from both years can be used to make important inferences concerning health-risk behaviors within this population.

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## ***KEY FINDINGS***

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- ✓ While 9% of Rhode Island students were overweight\* in 2001, and 14% were at risk of being overweight\*, substantially more (31%) described themselves as being slightly or very overweight and 42% were actually trying to lose weight. The percentage of females who were overweight was significantly less than for males (4% vs. 15%) and yet females were much more likely than males (37% vs. 25%) to think of themselves as overweight or to be trying to lose weight (59% vs. 26%).
- ✓ 56% of Rhode Island female students were trying to control weight by dieting in 2001 compared to 25% of male students. 64% of females and 48% of males also tried to control weight by exercising. While females were more involved in exercise for weight control than males in both 1997 and 2001, males narrowed the gap greatly from 1997. Less than 10% of students, especially males, were trying to lose weight by such extreme measures as vomiting or taking laxatives. However, 12% of Rhode Island students and 14% of students nationwide in 2001 tried fasting to lose weight. Females were more likely to fast than males (16% vs. 7%) in Rhode Island.
- ✓ In 2001, 71% of Rhode Island students ate at least one salad, nearly 90% ate fresh fruit or drank fruit juice, 76% ate potatoes, 56% ate carrots, and 85% ate some type of other vegetable during the week prior to the survey. However, only 27% of the students in Rhode Island had the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day in the past week. 23% of Rhode Island students drank the recommended 3 or more glasses of milk per day. A markedly higher proportion of male than female students consumed either the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables (32% vs. 23%) or the recommended servings of milk (31% vs. 15%).

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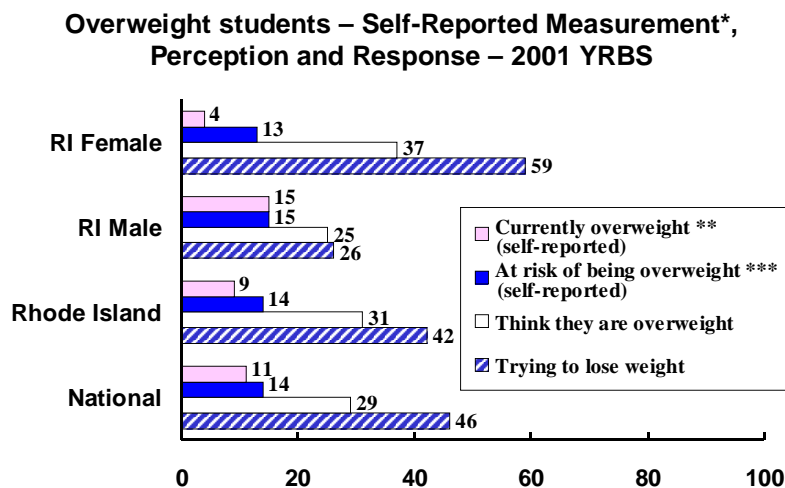
\* The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) define a student as overweight if their body mass index (BMI) is greater than or equal to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for their age and sex, based on national reference data. Students at greater than or equal to the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile for BMI, but less than the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile, are classified as being at risk of being overweight. Studies have shown that self-reported height and weight may tend to underestimate the actual proportion of students who are overweight.

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## Overweight and Weight Loss

**Risk Behavior:** Overweight and weight loss behaviors

**Rationale:** Overweight and obesity are increasing in both genders and among all population groups. In 1999, an estimated 61% of U.S. adults and 14% of adolescents aged 12-19 years old were overweight. In 1999, there were nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there were in 1980. Approximately 300,000 deaths a year in the U.S. are currently associated with overweight and obesity. Left unabated, overweight and obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking. Overweight or obesity acquired during childhood or adolescence may persist into adulthood and increase the risk later in life for coronary heart disease, gallbladder disease, some types of cancer, and osteoarthritis of the weight-bearing joints. In adolescence, obesity is associated with hyperlipidemia, hypertension, abnormal glucose tolerance, and adverse psychological and social consequences. Studies have shown high rates of body dissatisfaction and dieting among adolescent females, with many engaging in unhealthy weight control behaviors, such as fasting and self-induced vomiting which can lead to abnormal physical and psychological development.



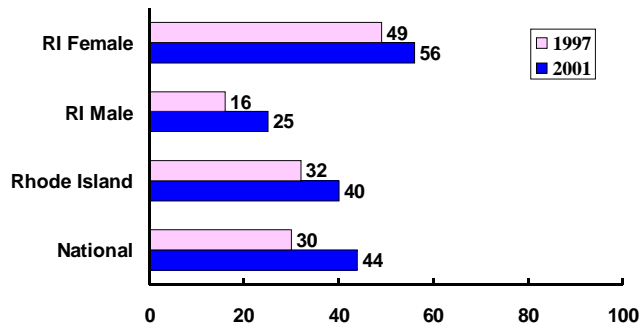
\* Measurement of student height and weight were self-reported and used to calculate body mass index, a reasonable proxy measure of overweight, although it may underestimate the actual proportion of overweight students.

\*\* Students who were  $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$  percentile for body mass index, by age and sex, based on reference data.

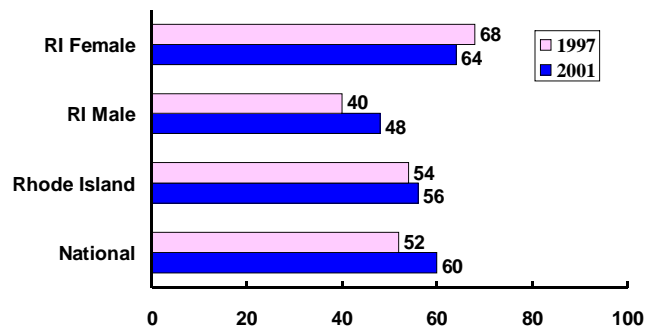
\*\*\* Students who were  $\geq 85^{\text{th}}$  percentile for body mass index, but  $< 95^{\text{th}}$  percentile, by age and sex, based on reference data.

## Overweight and Weight Loss

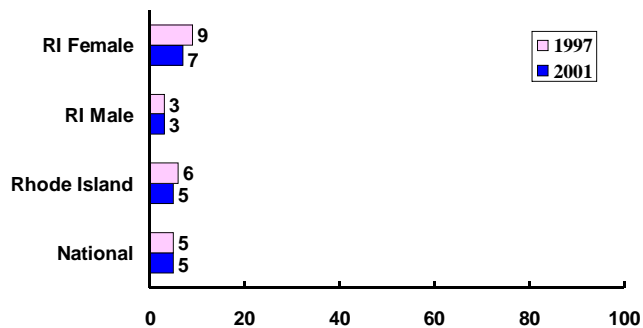
Percentage of students who dieted to lose weight or keep from gaining weight over the past 30 days



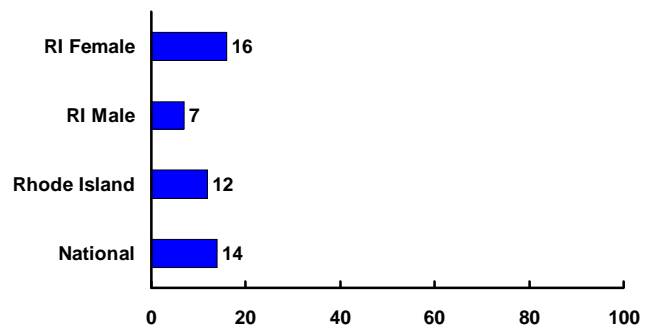
Percentage of students who exercised to lose weight or keep from gaining weight over the past 30 days



Percentage of students who vomited or took laxatives to lose weight or keep from gaining weight



Percentage of students who went without eating for 24 hours or more to lose weight or keep from gaining weight during the past 30 days – 2001 YRBS

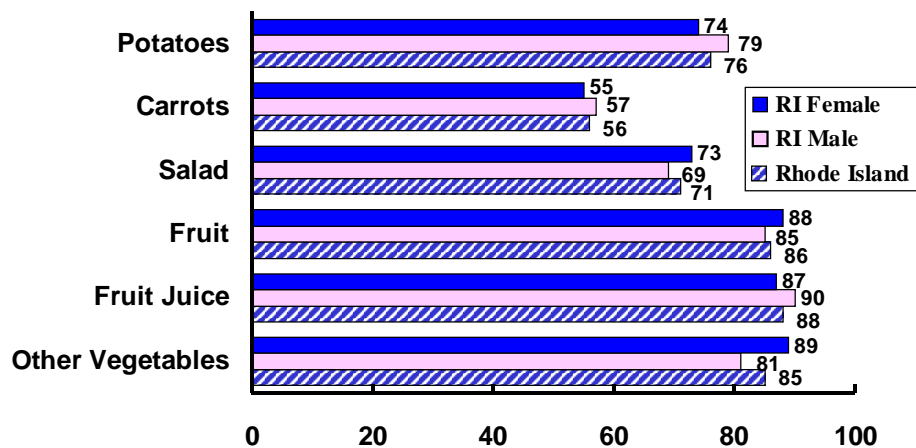


## Dietary Patterns

**Risk Behavior:** Dietary behaviors – intake of fruits, vegetables, and milk

**Rationale:** Fruits and vegetables are good sources of complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and other substances that are important for good health. Dietary patterns with higher intakes of fruits and vegetables are associated with a decreased risk for some types of cancer. Milk is by far the largest single source of calcium for high school students. Calcium is essential for the formation and maintenance of bones and teeth. Low calcium intake during the first two to three decades of life is an important risk factor in the development of osteoporosis.

**Percentage of students who ate or drank the following at least once during the past seven days – 2001 YRBS**



**Percentage of students who had the recommended daily servings of important food groups during the past seven days – 2001 YRBS**

